

trustee tale

Newsletter for Public Library Trustees

Show 'em You're Hurting

Let patrons know how budget cuts impact library service

By David Miller

Public libraries should never miss an opportunity to market their needs to the public. This is especially true when funding cuts translate into fewer new materials and fewer services. Library board members should spend part of one of their meetings brainstorming different ways to let their patrons know how budget cuts have impacted the library.

Among the possibilities:

- Posters at check out asking patrons to be patient because you have had to reduce staff hours.
- Signs around the magazine racks telling patrons what magazines you no longer subscribe to due to cutbacks.
- Signs on empty or partially empty shelves where new fiction and non-fiction books are usually on display. The signs could list how much the board has had to cut back on spending for new books. (Such signs should also be placed on the shelves for audio books, DVDs and CDs).
- Notes on computers indicating how much the library has had to cut in their budget for Internet-accessible computers (including money for new purchases and maintenance).
- Signs should also be posted inside entrances and on the outside windows of doors to note any reduction in hours the library is open due to cuts in funding (identify the funding source and how much of the funding has been cut).

Other areas where explanations might be needed would be in meeting rooms (if rental rates have had to be increased or initiated), local history departments (if funding cuts have had an impact on staffing or acquisitions), and the children's area (explaining reduced story times, reduced purchase of new children's books). Given the library and its funding situations, board members may come up with many additions to this list.

Some libraries mistakenly try to hide the realities of how they are being hurt by reductions in funding. Now is the time for total transparency in identifying how much the library has been cut in funding and the results of such reductions.

Patrons of most libraries are very vocal in their support of the library and often very passionate in their appeals to funding sources. They need to have all the facts in order to lobby, individually and possibly as groups, on behalf of their libraries.



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David Miller has been named to the National Advocacy Honor Roll of the American Library Association and the Association for Library Trustees and Advocates. He is past president of the State Library of Ohio Board, the Ohio Library trustees Association and the Wood County District Public Library Board. Miller is editor of the Sentinel-Tribune newspaper in Bowling Green, Ohio.

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FAQ

Are board committees subject to the Open Meetings Law?

Yes, any meeting of a board committee must have notice posted and minutes must be kept, just as for meetings of the entire board. This is true even if the committee is partially composed of members of the general public rather than trustees.

“About Us”

*by Rick Krumwiede, Director
Outagamie-Waupaca Library System*

These days most public libraries believe that it is important to have some kind of web presence, and the libraries in OWLS and Winnefox are no different. They all have at least minimal websites, and that’s a good thing. However, I have to admit that I’m often annoyed when I go looking for information on a library’s website, usually in the section called “About Us,” that isn’t there.

Okay, I’m probably not the typical library website browser. I’m usually looking for things like minutes, the names of board members, director and staff contact information, or policies, but I suspect that I’m not the only person who occasionally looks for this kind of information. I can imagine many scenarios where elected officials, library trustees, friends of the library, staff members, and even the general public might be looking for this information on a library’s website. That’s why I advocate posting the names of trustees, board minutes, and library policies on every library’s website.

Last week I needed some information about events at a member library, and I knew that the information would be included in the board minutes. However, when I went to the library’s website I discovered that they don’t post their minutes online, and that resulted in a very quick survey of OWLS and Winnefox library websites. I was pleased to find that 61% of the libraries include the names of their trustees on their sites. That’s not bad, but it would certainly be easy to do better. Forty-one percent of the library websites included policies, and quite a few also contained frequently asked policy-related questions. However, I was disappointed to find that only 15% of all the libraries post their library board minutes on their websites.

To me, posting a public organization’s minutes on its website is a “no brainer.” Library Board minutes are the official record for every library, and in most cases they constitute the only official history of the library. Posting them online makes them easily retrievable, which can be very helpful in providing background about the library to elected officials, new trustees, or new employees. Reading the minutes is an efficient way for anyone to understand the issues the library is facing.

Open government is a tradition, and the law, in Wisconsin, and posting trustees names, policies, and minutes provides transparency to the library’s operations. The public’s confidence in the library is enhanced when it is clear that the library has nothing to hide, and every citizen deserves to know who represents him in overseeing the library’s operations. Posting this information also conveys a positive image for the library. It adds credibility, and it demonstrates that the library functions in a “business-like” manner.

So, library trustees, how are your libraries doing?



The Library Director Search Process— Hiring From Within or Conducting a Search Process

By Mark W. Arend, Assistant Director
Winnefox Library System

When a library director leaves the library the board is sometimes tempted to skip a formal search process and promote the assistant director or another staff member to the director's position, especially when the outgoing director recommends the promotion. Some of the reasons given for doing this include:

- Belief that the internal candidate is a “known quantity”.
- Fear that there won't be any qualified candidates for the position. This is especially common in a very small library.
- Fear that other staff may be unhappy if their co-worker is not hired for the position.
- Fear that the person not hired may quit or be resentful of the person hired in their place.
- Fear that not hiring the internal candidate may ruffle local political feathers or cause talk around town.
- Reluctance on the board's part to go through the time-consuming and sometimes difficult process of advertising, reviewing candidates, and interviewing.

While this internal candidate may indeed be a good choice there are several reasons not to take the easy way out but to advertise the position and carefully evaluate all candidates.

- The internal candidate may indeed be a good choice but may not be the *best* choice. You owe it to the library to look for the best person for the job, not just one who may be good enough.



- Any time there's a staff vacancy is an opportunity to reevaluate the job and think about what skills are needed for that position. This is especially true when it's the director's job that's vacant. This is the time to look at the library's current state, tasks on the near horizon, and the goals set out in the library's long-range plan, and to hire someone best suited to lead the library.
- Hiring an internal candidate who has competed against other candidates and been selected as the strongest candidate can eliminate any speculation that the internal candidate was hired because they

were already there, or because of who they knew, or because they “deserve it” after long service to the library. A new director needs the support of the community, and you owe it to internal candidates to facilitate that happening.

- An assistant director or other staff member may not be temperamentally suited to be a director. There is a vast difference between being an assistant director under a competent library director and being the library director.

- Even in the smallest town there are qualified persons who would make an excellent library director. Unless you advertise and interview you may never realize who's out there.

Assistance is available for library boards embarking on a search process. System staff are available to provide information, advice and guidance. They may even know of possible

interim directors who can run the library while the board takes the necessary time to search for a permanent director.

Hiring a library director is one of the most important jobs the library board has. Boards should not take the easy way out and promote an internal candidate without going through the complete search process. Reviewing applicants for a library directorship is a lot of work and takes time but the payoff is worth it.



**September is Library Card Sign-up Month -
a time to remind everyone that a library card is the
smartest card of all.**

Have questions?

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